



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

1930 Ninth Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 406.4HEALTH or 406.443.2584
Fax: 406.457.8990

(Note to editor: Please note that, at the end of this article, there is a short sidebar to run with it. Thank you!)

**For IR Public Health Column
May 2014**

**Contact: Melanie Reynolds, Health Officer, 406-457-8910
Gayle Shirley, Communications Coordinator, 406-457-8908**

Don't Let Arthritis Stand in the Way of Spring Activities

**By Melanie Reynolds
County Health Officer**

Is arthritis standing between you and a chance to explore spring's many outdoor pleasures?

As anyone who has arthritis will attest, joint pain and stiffness take a lot of the fun out of hiking, climbing, bicycling, kayaking, and gardening. It would be easy to make arthritis an excuse for living life on the sofa.

In fact, doctors used to recommend that people with arthritis avoid exercise, because it would damage their joints. Now we know better. Research has shown that aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities can actually:

- keep joints flexible and less stiff;
- strengthen the muscles around joints, improving stability;
- slow further breakdown of bone and cartilage;
- improve bone strength;
- increase the ability to do daily activities; and
- boost mood and quality of life.

And you can reap all those benefits without making your arthritis worse!

Tailor Your Activity

What's important is to develop an exercise program that's tailored to you. It should take into account what type of arthritis you have (there are more than 100 different types and related conditions), how active your arthritis is, and which joints are affected.

If you haven't been exercising regularly, talk to your doctor or a physical therapist about designing a program that meets your needs.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that everyone, including people with arthritis, get 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise a week. If you have arthritis, activities that build muscle and improve flexibility and balance are also beneficial.

Any physical activity is better than none. If you can't do 150 minutes every week, be as active as your health allows. Some of the best exercises are low-impact activities like walking, bicycling, swimming, and water aerobics.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer guidelines on types and intensity of exercise at www.cdc.gov/arthritis/pa_overview.htm.

The Montana Arthritis Program collaborates with sites across the state to implement the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program and the Walk with Ease Program. To find a class near you, visit the program's website at www.dphhs.mt.gov/arthritis/.

Exercise Tips

The most common risk of exercise is aggravating your arthritis by working your joints or muscles too much. This can happen if you exercise wrong or too long or too hard, especially when you're first getting started.

So don't overdo it. Listen to your body. It can take people with arthritis more time to adjust to a new level of activity.

If necessary, you can modify your activity by decreasing the number of days you exercise, decreasing the time you spend exercising each day, or changing your type of activity.

The Arthritis Foundation and CDC offer these tips for exercising with arthritis:

- Exercise at the time of day when you have the least stiffness and pain.
- Warm up and cool down before and after exercise.
- Start slowly and build the amount of time you spend exercising.
- Exercise at a level that allows you to talk comfortably.
- Make sure you have good, comfortable shoes (unless you're swimming, of course!).

Be sure to visit with your health-care provider if you have:

- Pain from exercise that lasts more than two hours or gets worse at night;
- Pain that's sharp, stabbing, and constant;
- Pain that isn't relieved by rest, medication, or hot/cold packs; or
- Joints that are swollen and feel "hot" or are red.

You can learn more about being active with arthritis at www.arthritis.org/physicalactivity.

Sidebar in box:

Arthritis is one of the most common chronic diseases, as well as the leading cause of disability in the United States. It affects children, young adults, and older adults.

In Montana, more than a quarter of adults say they've been diagnosed with arthritis. You run a greater risk of developing arthritis if you're female, older, overweight or obese, and have a lower than average education and household income.

May is Arthritis Awareness Month. You can learn more about living with arthritis from the Arthritis Foundation, www.arthritis.org